

Michael Pollan Biography

Source: www.Litlovers.com



Few writers have done more to revitalize our national conversation about food and eating than Michael Pollan, an award-winning journalist and bestselling author whose witty, offbeat nonfiction shines an illuminating spotlight on various aspects of agriculture, the food chain, and man's place in the natural world.

Pollan's first book, *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education* (1991), was selected by the American Horticultural Society as one of the 75 best books ever written about gardening. But it was *Botany of Desire*, published a full decade later, that put him on the map. A fascinating look at the interconnected evolution of plants and people, *Botany...* was one of the surprise bestsellers of 2001. Five years later, Pollan produced *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, a delightful, compulsively readable "ecology of eating" that was named one of the ten best books of the year by the New York Times and Washington Post. And in 2008, came *In Defense of Food*.

A professor of journalism at the University of California at Berkeley, Pollan is a former executive editor for Harper's and a contributing writer for the New York Times, where he continues to examine the fascinating intersections between science and culture.

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Book Summary

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A New York Times bestseller that has changed the way readers view the ecology of eating, this revolutionary book by award winner Michael Pollan asks the seemingly simple question: What should we have for dinner?

Tracing from source to table each of the food chains that sustain us — whether industrial or organic, alternative or processed — he develops a portrait of the American way of eating. The result is a sweeping, surprising exploration of the hungers that have shaped our evolution, and of the profound implications our food choices have for the health of our species and the future of our planet.

Discussion Questions

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1. Michael Pollan approaches eating as an activity filled with ethical issues. Do you agree that the act of eating is as morally weighty as he says it is? What questions concern you most about the way you eat or the way your food is created?
2. Some readers might argue that Pollan's ethics do not go far enough, perhaps because he does not urge us all to become vegetarians or possibly because of the zeal with which he pursues the feral pig that he kills toward the end of *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. Did you find yourself quarreling with any of Pollan's ethical positions, and why?
3. Pollan argues that capitalism is a poor economic model to apply to the problems of food production and consumption. Do you agree or disagree, and why?
4. Pollan also shows a number of instances in which government policies have apparently worsened the crisis in our food culture. What do you think should be the proper role of government in deciding how we grow, process, and eat our food?
5. How has Michael Pollan changed the way you think about food?
6. At the end of *In Defense of Food*, Pollan offers a series of recommendations for improved eating. Which, if any, do you intend to adopt in your own life?

7. Which of Pollan's recommendations would you be least likely to accept, and why?

8. Do you think that the way Americans eat reveals anything about our national character and broader shared values? How is Pollan's writing a statement not only about American eating, but about American culture and life?

9. In both *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and *In Defense of Food*, Pollan quotes the words of Wendell Berry: "Eating is an agricultural act." What does Berry mean by this, and why is his message so important to Pollan's writing?

10. In each part of *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Michael Pollan has a particular friend to help him understand the food chain he is investigating: George Naylor in Iowa, Joel Salatin at Polyface, and Angelo Garro in northern California. Which of these men would you most like to know personally, and why?

11. What, in the course of his writing, does Michael Pollan reveal about his own personality? What do you like about him? What, if anything, rubs you the wrong way?

12. If Michael Pollan were coming to your place for dinner, what would you serve him and why? [Or would you finally come to your senses...and cancel? —ed.]



The Omnivore's Dilemma by Michael Pollan



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